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# Media framing of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production: an analysis of reporting in UK farming and mainstream print press

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores how UK mainstream and farming print press report the issues arising from the prevalent use of migrant labour in UK horticulture. Domestic fruit and vegetable production is central to achieving transition to a sustainable diet with positive health, environment and social outcomes, including for its 80,000+ migrant workers. How policymakers understand the issues will determine whether the policy actions they take will address the underlying causes of UK horticulture's dependency on low-paid migrant labour. This study conducts a qualitative content analysis of 92 articles in leading national farming and mainstream press between 01/02/2015 – 26/06/2020. Findings show that reporting in both press was significantly slanted toward concerns and interests of farm business groups, correlated with prominent representation of this groups' voice in reporting. This contrasts with minimal presence of the voices of migrant workers and social reform stakeholders. Both press deployed an economic frame in which migrant workers were discussed in purely commercial terms. The prevailing market model of journalism increases the potential for well-resourced groups to dominate media reporting and shape framing. Such stakeholder groups are unhindered – if not aided – by a largely absent neo-liberal state, creating socio-political conditions which militate against policy reforms to bring about a more economically and socially just supply chain.

**Keywords:** agricultural migrant labor, fruit and vegetable production, media framing, farming press

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The UK's neoliberal political economy has given rise to private sector governance (Lang *et al.* 2009) and "supermarketisation" of food supply chains (Dixon & Banwell, 2016) which the literature suggests militates against social and economic upgrading of migrant agri-workers (Geddes & Scott, 2010; Barrientos *et al.* 2011; Devlin, 2016). Whilst the issue of labour exploitation is often framed as a problem of global – rather than domestic – supply chains, the issue is prevalent in the UK with evidence suggesting "everyday" exploitation is becoming normalized within the legitimate labour market (GLAA, 2018; Davies, 2019; Davies, 2020). Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic have revealed the economic and social deficiencies in our dependence upon, attitudes to, and treatment of migrant workers (Davies, 2019; Morrison, 2019; Barling, 2020), exposing the vulnerabilities of UK domestic fruit and vegetable supply. The low economic and social status of agricultural work reinforces British workers' negative perceptions, further embedding fruit and vegetable farmers' dependency on migrant workers (Geddes & Scott, 2010 and Davies, 2019: 295-298). Despite exploitation of migrant workers being a recognised and growing issue in the UK (ILO, 2003: 24-25; GLAA, 2018 and Davies, 2019:298), it remains a neglected area of research (Crane et al, 2019: 86). Studies have found a dualistic media framing of migrant workers, simultaneously framed as a threatening "other" and as an indispensable economic asset, critical to the production process and business/sector viability (Bauder, 2005 and Morrison, 2019). The comparative difference between earnings in home and host nation is often the justification given by farm businesses for migrants' low pay and poor working conditions, framed as an 'opportunity' for migrants to improve their lot (Bauder, 2005: 46-52).

The media play an important role in defining a social problem and 'explicitly or implicitly assign[ing] responsibility for the causes and solutions to social problems which in turn inform judgement and actions on the part of citizens and policymakers' (Wells & Caraher, 2014: 1428). The tradition of public service journalism - under threat in the market model of journalism - is crucial for

engendering a public discourse amongst citizens and policymakers that is inclusive not just of the media's favoured elites and profitable target audiences, but also for the neglected voices of the economically marginalized minority groups (Hodgetts *et al.* 2007: 62).

Migrant workers are the most powerless, voiceless actors in the supply chain (Davies 2020) and in common with other non-elite groups at the margins of society, are among the most poorly represented in media reporting of social problems (Wells & Caraher, 2014; McKendrick *et al.* 2008). With trade unions struggling to represent a mobile and atomized labour force (Wilkinson, 2014: 508 and Bonnano, 2015: 257), migrant workers face considerable challenges in overcoming the power differential that gives elite groups privileged access to the media (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016: 460). This suggests an explanation as to why media reporting of social problems tends to focus on concerns and outcomes that are peripheral to the core problems experienced by those most directly affected (McKendrick *et al.*, 2008: 22-24).

An established literature shows that the way the media frame an issue has implications for policy. Media framing is one of several significant factors (including, for eg., focusing events, interest group lobbying, participation on advisory panels etc.) that reflect and shape public opinion and political discourse and, ultimately, policy positions and priorities (Entman, 2007; Hodgetts *et al.* 2008; Buse, 2012). It therefore follows that media framing of the issues relating to the prevalent use of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production, can be a significant factor influencing policymakers' understanding of the dominant issues, how problems are defined, and where responsibility lies for causes and solutions (Wells & Caraher, 2014). This understanding will, in turn, influence their decisions on what policy interventions are required to achieve an economically and socially resilient supply chain to support the transition to a healthy, sustainable food system for all.

There is a paucity of research in the area of media framing of labour-related issues in UK food production, described by Crane *et al.*, as a 'blind spot in the literature' (2019: 86). More-over, research tends to focus only on mainstream media, paradoxically overlooking the farming press

which directly serves farmers. Searches of EBSCOhost and Scopus databases, and Google Scholar, found that no such study has so far been undertaken. This study contributes to addressing both gaps in research by conducting an analysis of media framing of issues relating to the prevalent use of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production, in UK mainstream and farming print press between the period 01/02/2015 to 26/06/2020. It pays particular regard to the literature on framing being shaped, in part, by a media organisation's affiliations and target audience (Entman, 2007), and the role of elite actors, such as politicians and interest groups, in influencing media framing to align with their own interests and concerns (Kingdon, 2014). The extent to which differences exist between the two press in the issues reported and how they are framed is important to understand because of the influence both press exercise in shaping the opinion of the publics they serve and policymakers' understanding, judgement and decisions on actions to take (Hollifield, 1997; Buse, 2012 and Hilton *et al.*, 2012).

### ***The roles of media and elite actors in framing a story***

The way the media decide to frame a story is highly influential in telling audiences what issues to think about and how to think about them. This in turn informs judgements and decisions on actions to take (Buse *et al.*, 2012: 77; Hilton *et al.*, 2012: 1965 and Vliengenthart *et al.*, 2016: 285).

Frequency of reporting is also known to be a factor in determining an issue's prominence for public and policymakers (McCombs & Shaw, 1972 and Wood *et al.*, 2014: 583).

It is widely accepted that the media is not impartial with decisions on how to frame the issues reported determined by commercial goals, political affiliations and values of news organisations' owners, journalists, advertisers and audiences (Entman, 1993; Entman, 2007; Buse *et al.*, 2012; Williams, 2010). This suggests the issue of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production may be reported differently by the farming press compared to the mainstream press. In the few studies that compare framing in mainstream and farming press, some similarities have been found in framing of contentious issues across both types of press (Morris *et al.*, 2016 ), but with the farming

press clearly reflecting the prevalent views and policy positions of its specific industry audience (Naylor, *et al.*, 2017), typical of the specialist trade press genre. This close relationship between the press and its audience raises questions about bias and lack of objectivity in reporting, with the literature suggesting the trade press's primary role is to serve the interests of its industry rather than the public interest (Hollifield, 1997: 759). Studies have found the specialist trade press is less likely than the mainstream press to report on issues that have negative implications for industry innovations or initiatives (Marti, 1980; Sweeney & Hollifield, 2000: 18-19).

Media's framing of issues can also be viewed as a function of its 'sense-making' role (Hodgetts, 2007), translating 'public opinion into a discernible narrative which in turn shapes politicians' own policy positions and priorities' (Kingdon, 2014: 67; Vliengenthart, 2016: 285). The process is dynamic with public opinion, media framing and discourse reacting to events, and to each other.

Focusing events can radically advance new or previously dormant issues on to the political agenda (Birkland, 1998), opening policy windows through which problems and policy solutions can be moved onto the Government's decision-making agenda (Kingdon, 2014). The outbreak of bovine spongiform encephalopathy or 'mad cow' disease across UK cattle farming in the late 1980s, is an example of a focusing event which transformed the niche issue of cattle health to a mainstream public health crisis, forcing the issue to the top of the government's policy-making agenda and – eventually – to the formation of the Food Standards Agency (Lang & Heasman, 2015). As a focusing event, the Covid-19 pandemic has the potential to increase awareness of social issues arising from the UK's dependency upon, and treatment of, migrant workers in domestic fruit and vegetable production. However, substantive outcomes are largely dependent on the ability of pro-reform groups to self-mobilize into well organized and sustained advocacy coalitions to take advantage of opportunities to influence reporting (Birkland, 1998; Buse, 2012; Hilton *et al.* 2014:).

The state is protagonist, rather than bystander, of private governance of the food system, deploying what Lang coins a "leave it to Tesco *et al*" attitude to regulation (2020: 62). Where the state does

121 intervene, policy is narrowly focused on market competition issues with social issues overlooked  
122 (Lang *et al.*, 2009: 169). It is generally agreed by policy analysts that transformation of the food  
123 system will not be achieved if left to market forces alone. Government needs to lead in setting  
124 objectives across social, labour and agricultural policies and regulation (Lang *et al.*, 2009: 177 and  
125 Devlin, 2016).

126 The state's framing of migrant workers in the public discourse appears capricious; it welcomes the  
127 contribution of migrant workers to the economy so far as they are willing to fulfil essential but low-  
128 paid jobs under conditions rejected by indigenous workers, whilst concurrently 'declin[ing] the  
129 responsibility of providing [migrant workers] with the social and employment protections that would  
130 traditionally attach themselves to citizenship.' (Wilkinson, 2014: 512).

131 As a source of information, politicians are an elite group particularly favoured by journalists, and  
132 their voices tend to feature prominently compared to non-elite "ordinary people" in media reporting  
133 (McKendrick *et al.*, 2008; Wells & Caraher, 2014 and Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). The specialist  
134 trade press, with their expert status and role to serve their industry audience, are known to be more  
135 active than mainstream press at the early stage reporting of a policy-related issue in an attempt to  
136 influence political elites whilst industry-related policy positions are being formed (Hollifield, 1997:  
137 769).

138 An interest group is defined as 'a group or organisation with particular aims and ideas that tries to  
139 influence the government' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020). Well-resourced political and business  
140 groups are typically most effective at influencing the framing of issues to align with their vested  
141 interests and political or campaign objectives (Kingdon, 2014 and Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016:  
142 454). This is not to say that the presence of an issue or an interest group's view in reporting is the  
143 sole determinant of framing. What and who is absent is of equal import (Entman, 1993).

144 The "market model" of journalism, in which news organisations are under increased pressure to  
145 produce more content with fewer journalists is key in determining what stories are reported and

how they are framed (Davies, 2009 and Wells & Caraher, 2014: 1437). The model sets up an exchange relationship between the press and elite sources such as business groups, in which content is provided in return for coverage, ensuring businesses groups' framing of issues around their interests and concerns feature prominently in reporting (Lewis *et al.*, 2008: 2; Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016: 453-454 and Weishaar *et al.*, 2016: 9).

The main representative bodies for farmers and growers – the National Farmers Union and British Summer Fruits - frame the issue of unequal power-relations as one impacting producers, with waged labour framed in economic terms as a resource scarcity and factor of profitable production (Scott *et al.*, 2012: 17; EFRA, 2017; NFU, 2017 and Pelham, 2017). Whilst this narrow economic framing of labour is consistent with early GVC scholarship, it is increasingly understood that economic upgrading of workers will only be achieved through social upgrading where workers are seen as being socially embedded in the economy with recognized rights and entitlements (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011: 322).

### ***The food policy context and research questions***

The literature suggests that the dynamics of the UK's fruit and vegetable buyer-driven supply chains militates against securing thriving and resilient domestic fruit and vegetable production because the governance ceded by state to supermarkets creates power imbalances that squeeze farmers' profit margins leaving them little option but to exploit workers in order to meet supermarkets' onerous contractual pressures (Davies, 2020). A vicious circle ensues in which the low economic and social status of horticultural work reinforces negative perceptions among British workers, perpetuating the sector's dependency on migrant workers (Geddes & Scott, 2010 and Davies, 2020).

By analysing media framing in mainstream and farming press, the study will contribute to an understanding of the extent to which the different values, affiliations and audiences of the two types of press (Entman, 2007 and Sweeney & Hollifield, 2000), shape differences in reporting and framing, and what policy implications may arise as a result.

## **2. METHOD**

A qualitative content analysis (QCA) of a sample of articles published in mainstream and farming press between 01/02/2015 and 26/06/2020 was conducted. This section sets out the chosen research methodology, the reasons for its selection, and the process undertaken to collect and analyse data in order to address the research questions posed.

### ***Theoretical approach***

The research is grounded in a constructivist epistemology where truth and meaning are constructed through interactions with the world, resulting in different understandings of the same phenomena (Gray, 2018: 22). This is consistent with the purpose of the research which seeks to establish how media framing influences – and is influenced by – the interests, discourses and contexts of the different audiences (Krippendorff, 2004:22-25) of mainstream and farming press, and how different groups use frames to convince others of a particular understanding of an issue and a certain course of action(s) to address it (Morris *et al.*, 2016: 45). At the data analysis stage, Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) provided the flexibility to build a combined data and concept driven coding frame to enable the researcher to capture explicit meanings present in the text, and find the patterns of deeper, implicit meanings of text through interpretation – rather than simple description - of texts within the wider social context in which they exist (Matthes & Kohring, 2008).

The period from February 2015 to June 2020 was selected as it encompasses important events germane to labour-related food policy events (see Section 3.3.3). A 5 year timeframe was selected, as opposed to a shorter snapshot of time, to improve the value of findings by capturing the discursive shifts and turns found to be present in media reporting of significant social issues (Morrison, 2019).

## **Research methodology**

QCA is defined as “the subjective interpretation of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005: 1278). QCA was chosen as the research method because it is an established method for media analysis and because its three main features suited the scope and purpose of this exploratory study: 1) analysis reduces data, 2) it is systematic and 3) it is flexible in allowing for a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods within the same coding frame (Schreier, 2014: 2) to discover and analyse quantifiable and explicit (manifest) content as well as implicit and more context-dependent (latent) content (Schreier, 2014: 173). The last feature was important to get beyond what Seale describes as the ‘crass’ content of *what* is said in relation to reporting on migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production, in order to interpret the implicit, underlying meanings in *how* it is said through the narrative focus and framing of issues within the text (Seale, 2012: 460 and Hilton & Hunt, 2010: 942).

## **Sampling strategy and data collection**

The objective of the sampling strategy was to create a sample that was relevant, representative and manageable (Seale, 2012: 461). To ensure a relevant and representative sample, the sampling strategy selected from lead publications - as measured by the Audit Bureau for Circulation (ABC) – from the national farming and mainstream press (see Tables 1 and 2). The sample was limited to print media to ensure it was manageable within study constraints. Print media is an accessible and reliable format for study (Wells & Caraher, 2014: 1430), and the Nexis UK news database provided a comprehensive archive of UK newspaper and trade press. To aid meaningful comparison between the two types of press, selection criteria was designed to ensure – so far as possible – similarity in publication format, i.e. titles being i) leading national print publications by circulation ii) publication intervals no greater than weekly iii) publications with general editorial coverage, e.g. not specialist addressing just the economy or just horticulture and iv) for sale through open access model, i.e. from retail outlets.

## National newspapers

Table 1 lists the leading national UK newspapers using a common typology of ‘popular’ (tabloids) aimed primarily at a working-class readership, ‘mid-market’ aimed at a more middle-class readership, and ‘qualities’ (broadsheets) aimed at a middle-to-upper class readership (Hilton *et al.*, 2012). The leading national newspapers remain an important source of information with potential to influence policy-making and public opinion in line with their political positions. The mid-market Daily Mail and Daily Express are politically right-leaning. Newspapers in tabloid and broadsheet categories are more mixed in their political alignment, although most UK broadsheets are politically aligned with the right with the exception of The Guardian which is on the left. All the newspapers selected for study are in the top 10 for circulation according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC) and have digital formats carrying broadly similar content. Analysis of print formats therefore provides an indication of how issues are reported on-line.

**Table 1: Average circulation, UK national newspapers for period July-December 2019**

| Publication (daily titles) | Circulation | Circulation - Sunday counterparts |
|----------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Populares</b>           |             |                                   |
| The Sun                    | 1,238,307   | 1,050,779                         |
| Daily Mirror               | 468,088     | 382,985                           |
| Daily Star                 | 294,789     | 175,814                           |
| <b>Mid-markets</b>         |             |                                   |
| Daily Mail                 | 1,151,305   | 968,007                           |
| Daily Express              | 301,738     | 261,649                           |
| <b>Qualities</b>           |             |                                   |
| The Times                  | 370,621     | 653,981                           |
| The Daily Telegraph        | 314,687     | 248,619                           |
| I                          | 223,669     | -                                 |
| Financial Times            | 165,647     | -                                 |
| The Guardian               | 130,090     | The Observer                      |

(source: Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2019b)

## **Farming press**

Competition from digital media has led some specialist farming print publications to transition to digital formats as a result of the steady decline in demand for the print publications (landscapejuice.co.uk, 2011). Table 2 shows the leading national farming publications. Farmers Guardian (bmcontent.affino.com 2020), Farmers Weekly (fwi.co.uk, 2020b) and The Scottish Farmer (the Scottishfarmer.co.uk), were the only 3 titles meeting the selection criteria (see Section 3.2), and cover all the principal commercial fruit and vegetable producing countries and regions of the UK (Table 3). Whereas national newspapers are politically aligned, farming titles are industry aligned, although as such can be understood to be primarily focussed on the concerns and interests of the farming and growing businesses rather than agricultural workers.

**Table 2: Average Circulation, UK national farming print press**

| Publication                                             | Type                           | Distribution area | Circulation |                       | Period         |
|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|
|                                                         |                                |                   | Print       | Digital<br>Visits/mth |                |
| British Farmer & Grower                                 | Monthly                        | NFU membership    | 48,437      | -                     | Jan-Dec 2019   |
| Farmers Weekly                                          | National, weekly               | UK                | 41,533      | 623,231               | "              |
| Farmers Guide<br>(free listing magazine – no editorial) | Monthly                        | UK                | 30,285      | -                     | "              |
| Farmers Guardian                                        | National, weekly               | UK                | 28,149      | 370,000               | "              |
| The Scottish Farmer                                     | Scotland –<br>National, weekly | Scotland          | 13,557      | -                     | Jan-Dec 2018 * |

(source: Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2018; Audit Bureau of Circulation, 2019a; bmcontent.affino.com, 2020 and fwi.co.uk,2020a)

\* the last audit period before ABC stopped auditing circulation of The Scottish Farmer

**Table 3: Principal regions of UK horticulture**

| Country/region    | Region's agricultural output value (£m) | % of region's total agricultural output value |
|-------------------|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| East Midlands     | 300                                     | 10.4                                          |
| West Midlands     | 168                                     | 7.3                                           |
| East of England   | 307                                     | 9.6                                           |
| South East        | 266                                     | 12.0                                          |
| Tayside, Scotland | 318                                     | 10.0                                          |

(source: Scottish Government, 2018; Scottish Government, 2019 and DEFRA, 2020)

The final selection of print titles provides a relevant and representative sample, all being high circulation national print titles from both farming and mainstream press, with the mainstream titles representing a range of readership profiles from across all the 3 newspaper genres:

- **Mainstream print newspapers (and Sunday editions where available):** The Sun, The Sun on Sunday, Daily Mirror and the Sunday Mirror, Daily Mail and The Mail on Sunday, Daily Express, Sunday Express, The Times, The Sunday Times, The Guardian, The Observer, The Daily Telegraph, The Sunday Telegraph.
- **Farming publications:** Farmers Weekly, Farmers Guardian and The Scottish Farmer.

### ***Timeframe and search terms***

The chosen timeframe 01/02/2015 – 26/06/2020 encompassed key events germane to the research:

1) February 2015 announcement of Groceries Code Adjudicator's (GCA) investigation of Tesco plc (gov.uk, 2015).

2) the period pre and post Brexit referendum on 23/06/16.

3) May 2018, publication of Gangmasters & Labour Abuse Authority (GLAA) report into the nature and scale of labour exploitation in the UK (GLAA, 2018).

4) September 2018, publication of Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) report on the nature and impacts of migration of people into the UK from the European Economic Area (MAC, 2018).

5) first confirmed Covid-19 case in UK on 31/01/20 (BBC, 2020).

An initial search of Nexis UK database using the following search terms: horti! OR fruit OR veg! and labour! OR migrant! OR picker! OR work! and "United Kingdom", returned >2,000 results across mainstream newspapers. A number of conditional filters were applied until a search of the mainstream press and the farming press returned 237 and 89 articles respectively which was considered a manageable number of articles. These searches were labelled "Mainstream A" and "Farming A" (see Table 4). A skim-read of articles found articles mentioning exploitation only referred to workers in other countries supplying produce to the UK. A second search labelled "Mainstream B" and "Farming B" was conducted with search terms altered to include exploit! OR abuse OR pay! OR price! and supermarket! This added another 18 relevant articles in total, including ones mentioning exploitation of workers in the UK domestic supply chain (Lawrence, 2015 and Case, 2018).

279 **Table 4: Details of searches of Nexis UK database**

|                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                             |                         |
|--------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Search terms appearing in body of article: | (atleast3(fruit! OR veg!) AND w/20 (migrant! OR "migrant labour" OR "EU migrant labour" OR labour OR pick! OR work!)) AND ((farm! or horti! or agri! or "supply chain") AND (harvest! or crop or season!) and (UK OR "United Kingdom" OR Brit! OR Eng! OR Scot!)) and length > 300 AND NOT restaurant! AND NOT cook! |                                                                                                             |                         |
| Period:                                    | 01/02/2015 – 26/06/2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                             |                         |
| “Mainstream A”                             | 237<br>articles found                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | After removal of group duplicates/letters/<br>international news/other irrelevant:                          | 41<br>articles selected |
| “Farming A”                                | 89<br>articles found                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                             | 33<br>articles selected |
| Total articles selected:                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                             | 74                      |
| Search Terms appearing in body of article: | (("fresh produce" OR fruit OR veg!) AND "supply chain" w/20 (work! OR farm! OR migrant! OR supermarket!) AND (exploit! OR abuse OR pay! OR price!) AND (UK OR "United Kingdom" OR Brit! OR Eng! OR Scot!)) and length > 300                                                                                          |                                                                                                             |                         |
| Period:                                    | 01/02/2015 - 26/06/2020                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                             |                         |
| “Mainstream B”                             | 131<br>articles found                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | After removal of group duplicates/letters/<br>international news/repeats from Search A/<br>other irrelevant | 9<br>articles selected  |
| “Farming B”                                | 42<br>articles found                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                             | 9<br>articles selected  |
| Total articles selected:                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                             | 18                      |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF ARTICLES FOR CODING        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                             | 92                      |

280 (Source: Author)

281 The quality genre newspapers accounted for 306 of the 368 articles found. Only 62 articles were  
282 published in mid-market or popular newspapers. Of these most were assessed as irrelevant to the  
283 research topic. Removal of duplicates, letters, international news, and articles assessed as not having  
284 sufficient focus on the research topic resulted in a final corpus of 92 articles (see Table 4 and  
285 Appendix A for list of articles).

## **Analysis**

According to Schreier (2012), QCA comprises 3 principal stages: i) designing the coding frame, ii) carrying out a pilot study and iii) conducting the main analysis. A combined concept and data driven approach was taken to build the coding frame (Schreier, 2014: 89-90) with the 5 main thematic categories arrived at deductively, informed by the literature and the research questions. These were: issues, framing, solutions, focusing events, and voices (Appendix B) which were used to code the body text of selected articles.

Manifest data was defined as the date and name of publication, author (where relevant), word length, headline, and frequency of different types of actors mentioned or quoted. As well as this quantifiable data, manifest data also included concepts and ideas explicitly communicated in the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) and were coded under the thematic categories of issues, solutions, focusing events and voices.

In addition to coding the body text, headlines which provide an important signal about the focus and trajectory of a story (Hilton & Hunt, 2010: 942), were coded against 4 categories: “concern for farm business”, “concern for farm workers”, “concern for food supply”, and “other”.

Latent data was defined as the discourses and frames emerging from the text (Wells & Caraher, 2014), which were coded under the thematic category of framing. The two framing sub-categories - Economic (workers as a factor of production) and Social (workers as having/lacking rights and entitlements) - were informed by the literature, in particular on the social and economic upgrading of workers in global production networks (Barrientos *et al.*, 2011).

Sub-categories, for both manifest and latent thematic categories, emerged inductively from reading of the text. Using a strategy of subsumption, sub-categories were created for new themes or subsumed into an existing sub-category where relevant, until the process was exhausted. This ensured everything of relevance was captured by the coding frame including unexpected but relevant data (Schreier, 2012: 115-116).

A pilot study was undertaken to check the reliability and validity of the coding frame before proceeding with the main stage of coding (Schreier, 2012: 146), following which the coding frame was reevaluated to produce the final version. The coding frame demonstrated a sufficient degree of validity and reliability to proceed to the main analysis stage (Appendix C).

The main analysis stage involved the coding of the entire corpus of 92 articles. Each article was assigned a unique identifier for ease and accuracy of identification. Each article was read twice: first, to code for manifest data, then a second, more immersive reading allowed for in-depth interpretation of discourses and frames (Rivas, 2012: 368). This phase allowed for the analysis of the role of different stakeholder groups in influencing media framing (Kingdon, 2014 and Weishaar *et al.*, 2016), and how – if at all - the mainstream and farming press differed in their framing of issues. A technique of colour-coding segments of text and hand-written notation was used to identify the implied and often context-dependent wording of ideas and concepts within the text. See Appendix D for examples of the latent coding process.

All the manifest and latent data derived from the coding frame was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet to allow for further analysis to establish frequency, and patterns and correlations in the data.

Findings were reproduced in graphical form where it aided clarity of presentation and supported by discussion in the text. Hand-written notations of latent data to capture the nuances and implied – sometimes hidden – meanings of different framings and discourses were compared, interpreted and discussed in the text.

Coding of manifest data was used to examine which issues were reported and with what frequency, as well as which voices were represented or quoted and with what frequency. Coding of latent data was used to examine the frames used in the different publications and how – if at all – framing changed between the types of press and following the outbreak of Covid-19 in the UK.

### **3. FINDINGS**

This chapter begins with findings from the manifest data, followed by findings from interpretive analysis of frames and discourses which emerged from the coding process. Data has been compared between the farming and mainstream press, and between pre and post Covid-19 reporting.

#### **3.1 Manifest Data**

##### **Frequency, distribution and type of coverage.**

The corpus of 92 articles comprised 42 (46%) from the national farming press and 50 (54%) from the national mainstream press. 66 (72%) of the 92 articles were written between 01/02/15 – 30/01/20, referred to as the pre Covid-19 period; 35 (53%) in the mainstream press and 31 (47%) in the farming press. 26 (28%) of the 92 articles were written after the first confirmed Covid-19 case in the UK on 31/01/20 (BBC, 2020), referred to as the post Covid-19 period; 15 (58%) in the mainstream press and 11 (42%) in the farming press.

Table 5 shows the distribution and frequency of articles by publication. To provide a meaningful comparison between the two types of press Table 5 shows articles as a proportion of total editions. To allow for the substantially different time range between the pre Covid-19 period (260 weeks) and the post Covid-19 period (21 weeks), Table 5 also shows articles as a proportion of total editions for the pre and post Covid-19 periods, summarized in Figure 1. This clearly shows a significant increase in reporting in the farming press in the post Covid-19 period. In the mainstream press coverage also rose, with the most extensive coverage in the quality genres at 3% of all editions.

Reporting in mainstream national newspapers was overwhelmingly dominated by the quality genre newspapers, accounting for 42 (84%) of all articles in the mainstream press. The Guardian was the most prolific in its coverage, accounting for 44% of all mainstream newspaper coverage. The mean article word count was 843. 25% (22) of articles were >1000 words, with 86% of them published in the quality genre newspapers.

Figure 1: Top Five publications by percentage of editions which included articles covering issues relating to migrant workers in UK fruit and vegetable production

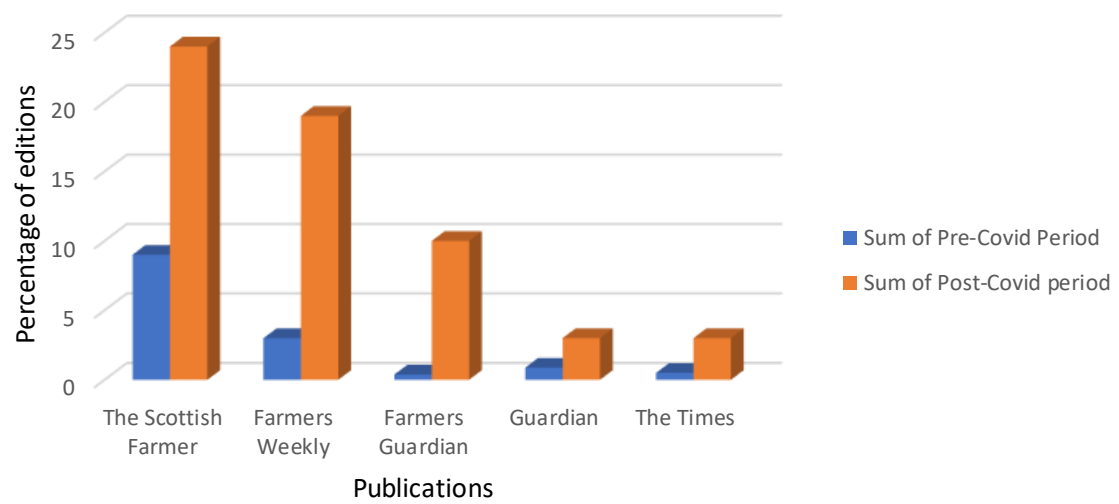


**Table 5: Reporting of issues relating to use of migrant workers in UK fruit and vegetable production, in UK farming and mainstream press.**

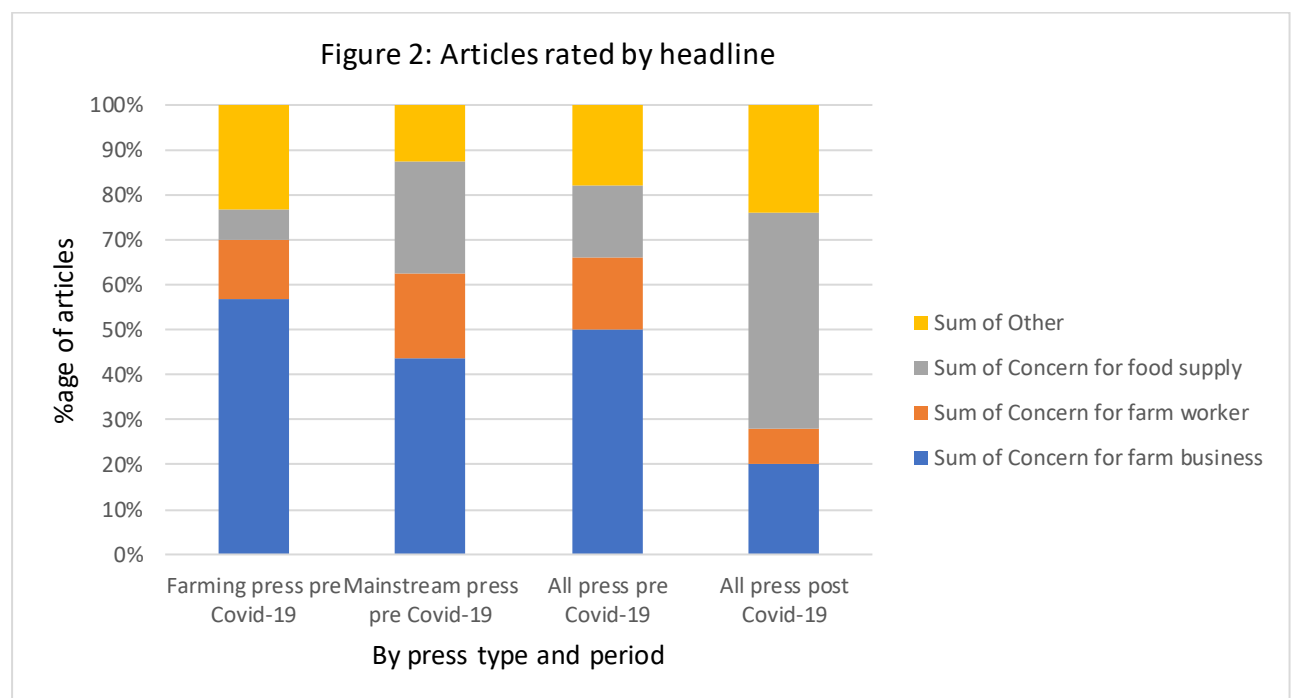
(source: Author)

|                     |                     |          |                                | Whole sample period<br>01.02.15 to 26.06.20 |                                      |                                      | Pre Covid-19<br>period<br>01.02.15 –<br>30.01.20 |                                  | Post Covid-19<br>period<br>31.01.20 –<br>26.06.2020 |                                  |
|---------------------|---------------------|----------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Type                | Genre               | Interval | Name                           | No. of<br>articles                          | %age of all<br>articles<br>published | %age of all<br>published<br>editions | No. of<br>articles                               | %age of<br>published<br>editions | No. of<br>articles                                  | %age of<br>published<br>editions |
| Farming press       | Specialist<br>trade | weekly   | The Scottish Farmer            | 28                                          | 30%                                  | 10%                                  | 23                                               | 9%                               | 5                                                   | 24%                              |
|                     |                     |          | Farmers Weekly                 | 11                                          | 12%                                  | 4%                                   | 7                                                | 3%                               | 4                                                   | 19%                              |
|                     |                     |          | Farmers Guardian               | 3                                           | 3%                                   | 1%                                   | 1                                                | 0.38%                            | 2                                                   | 10%                              |
|                     |                     |          | TOTAL for Farming<br>Press     | 42                                          | 46%                                  | 15%                                  | 31                                               | 12.38%                           | 11                                                  | 53%                              |
| Mainstream<br>press | Qualities           | daily    | The Guardian &<br>The Observer | 20                                          | 22%                                  | 1%                                   | 16                                               | 0.88%                            | 4                                                   | 3%                               |

|  |             |       |                                               |    |      |       |    |       |    |     |
|--|-------------|-------|-----------------------------------------------|----|------|-------|----|-------|----|-----|
|  |             |       | The Times &<br>The Sunday Times               | 14 | 15%  | 0.71% | 9  | 0.50% | 5  | 3%  |
|  |             |       | The Daily Telegraph &<br>The Sunday Telegraph | 8  | 9%   | 0.41% | 4  | 0.22% | 4  | 3%  |
|  |             |       | TOTAL for Qualities                           | 42 | 46%  | 2.12% | 29 | 1.59% | 13 | 9%  |
|  |             |       |                                               |    |      |       |    |       |    |     |
|  | Mid-markets | daily | Daily Mail &<br>The Mail on Sunday            | 6  | 7%   | 0.31% | 4  | 0.22% | 2  | 1%  |
|  |             |       | Daily Express &<br>Sunday Express             | 1  | 1%   | 0.05% | 1  | 0.05% | 0  | 0%  |
|  |             |       | TOTAL for Mid-markets                         | 7  | 8%   | 0.36% | 5  | 0.27% | 2  | 1%  |
|  | Populars    | daily | The Sun<br>& The Sun on Sunday                | 0  | 0%   | 0%    | 0  | 0%    | 0  | 0%  |
|  |             |       | Daily Mirror &<br>Sunday Mirror               | 1  | 1%   | 0.05% | 1  | 0.05% | 0  | 0%  |
|  |             |       |                                               |    |      |       |    |       |    |     |
|  |             |       | TOTAL for Populars                            | 1  | 1%   | 0.05% | 1  | 0.05% | 0  | 0%  |
|  |             |       | TOTAL for mainstream<br>press                 | 50 | 55%  | 2.53% | 35 | 1.91% | 15 | 10% |
|  |             |       | Overall Total                                 | 92 | 100% | n/a   | 66 | n/a   | 26 | n/a |

## Headlines

49% (31) of all articles written in the pre Covid-19 period were coded as having a headline “concern for farm business”, increasing to 55% in the farming press (Figure 2). In the post Covid-19 period headlines changed substantially, with “concern for food supply” headlines increasing from 16% to 48%. Articles having a headline “concern for farm workers” were in the minority at 15% of all articles written pre Covid-19, and 8% of articles written post Covid-19.

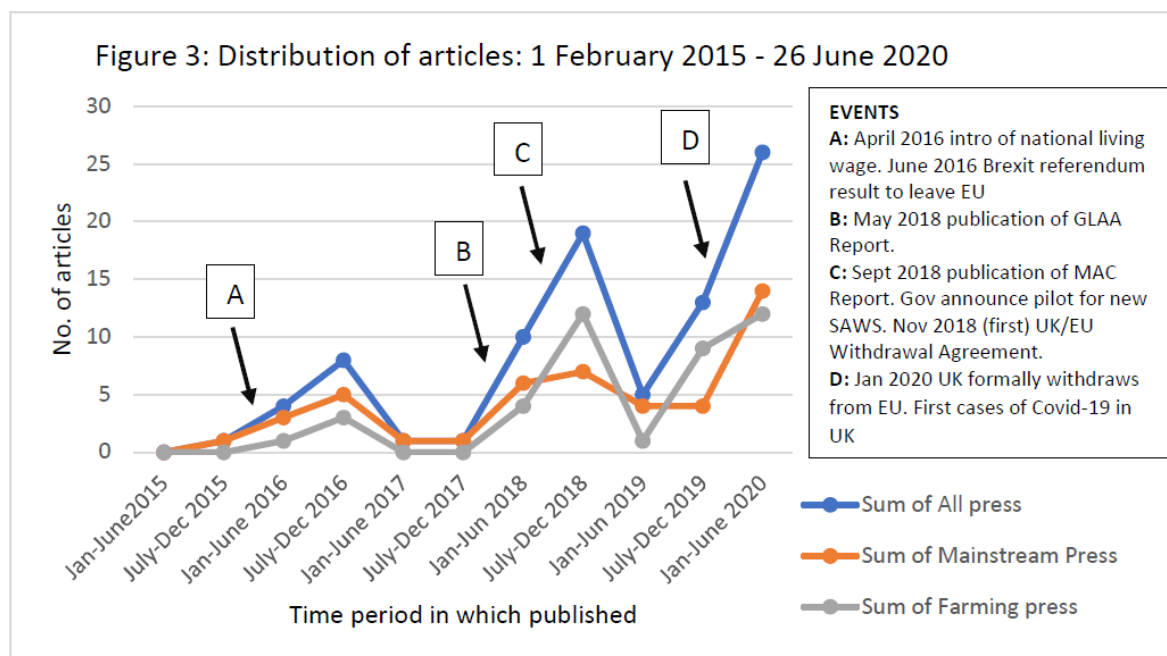


## Focusing Event

In the pre Covid-19 period Brexit was the most frequently mentioned focusing event in both the farming and mainstream press, with 22 (71%) farming press articles and 27 (77%) mainstream press articles citing Brexit as the event causing significant change to the status quo. All post Covid-19 articles mentioned Covid-19 pandemic as the focusing event.

Figure 3 shows a pattern of increased reporting following significant and relevant political or policy events. The outbreak of Covid-19 in the UK was followed by a significant increase in articles reporting on the need to find solutions to UK horticulture’s labour crisis in order to maintain supply of fruit and vegetables (Case 2020; Dixon, 2020 and Henderson, 2020). Whilst both press broadly

followed the same pattern of distribution, there was a greater frequency of reporting in the farming press following a call for evidence in February 2018, to the re-opened DEFRA inquiry into agri-labour constraints (parliament.uk, 2018), triggering an intense lobbying and media campaign by the NFU for a new Seasonal Agricultural Workers Scheme (SAWS), (NFU, 2018). Of the 13 articles published in the farming press between 1 July – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, 10 (77%) reported on the need for a new SAWS to solve horticulture’s labour crisis.



## Issues

In terms of the reporting of issues causing or driving the prevalence of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production, Figure 4 shows that both press were generally similar in frequency of reporting across the various issues. Government featured significantly as the main protagonist. The effect of incoherent or undermining government policy was the predominant issue reported in 29 (69%) articles in the farming press and 31 (62%) articles in the mainstream press. The associated issue of “government not listening/acting” was reported in 17 (40%) of articles in the farming press, and 15 (30%) in the mainstream press.

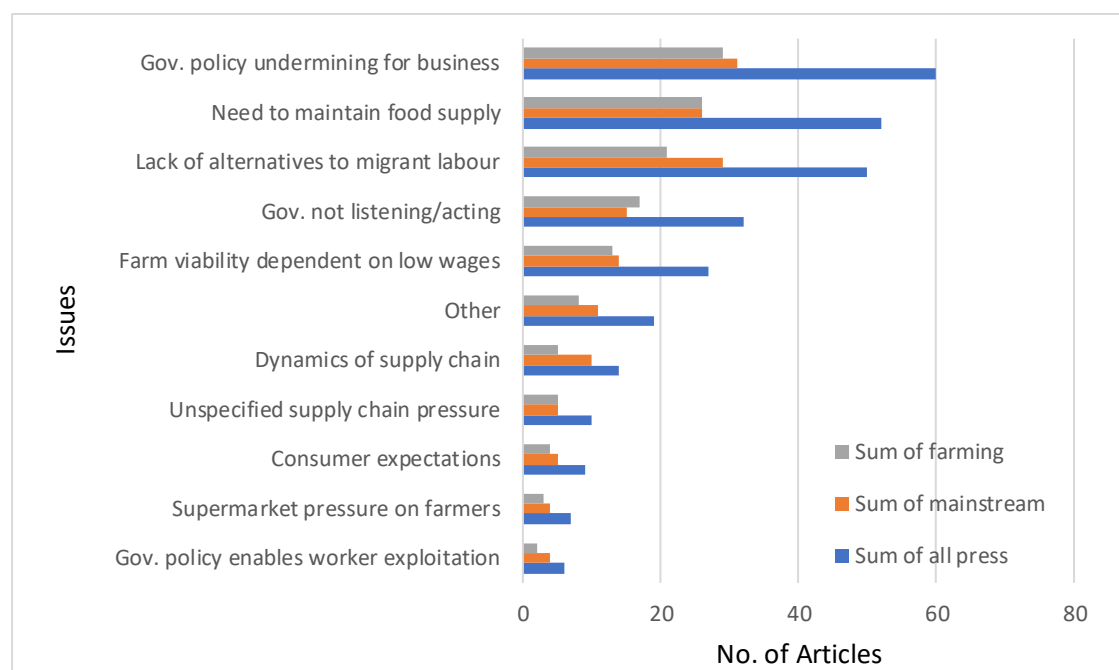
By contrast, the issue of “government policy enables worker exploitation” was reported in only 2 (5%) articles in the farming press and 4 (8%) articles in the mainstream press. Overall, it was the least reported issue in mainstream and farming press.

The lack of alternatives to migrant workers, such as automation or availability of an adequate domestic workforce, featured prominently in both press, mentioned in 29 (58%) articles in mainstream press and 21 (50%) articles in farming press.

The need to maintain supply of fruit and vegetables was a prevalent issue driving horticulture’s dependency on migrant labour, reported in 26 (52%) articles in the mainstream press and 26 (62%) articles in the farming press. Prevalence increased in both press during the post Covid-19 period with the issue being reported in 20 (77%) of articles compared to 31 (47%) articles in the pre Covid-19 period.

Of the three issues in which the supply chain was identified as the main protagonist, supermarket pressure of farmers was the least reported, mentioned in 3 (7%) articles in the farming press and 4(8%) articles in the mainstream press. The issue of unspecified supply chain pressure was mentioned in 5 (12%) articles in the farming press and 5 (10%) articles in the mainstream press. The third issue of dynamics of the supply chain was mentioned in 10 (24%) articles in farming press and 5 (10%) articles in mainstream press.

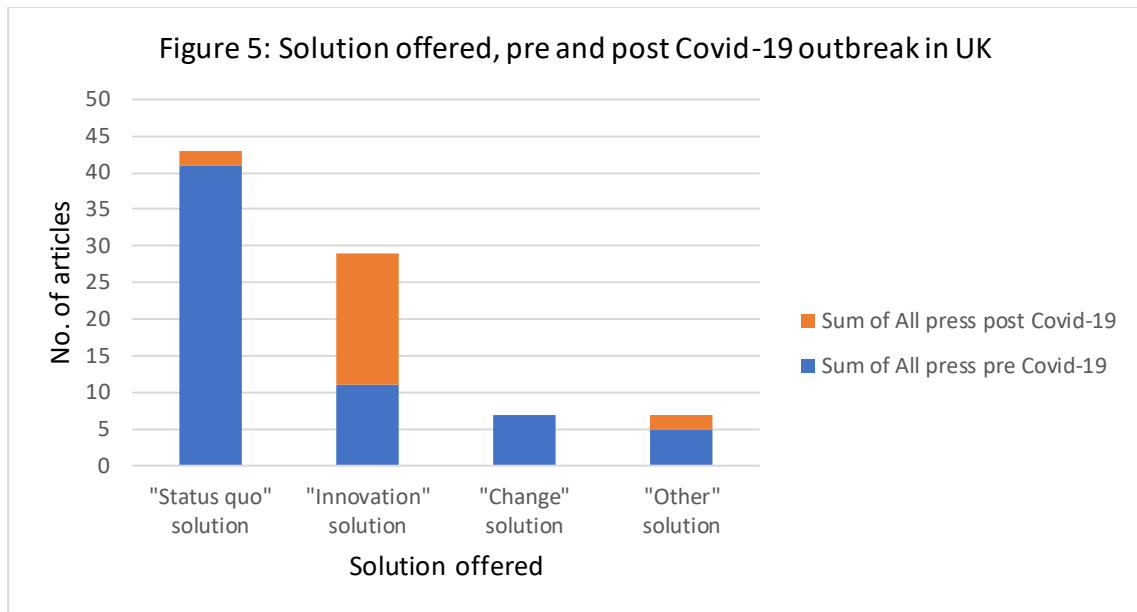
**Figure 4: Frequency of issues reported in relation to use of migrant labour in UK horticulture**



### ***Solution(s) offered***

Articles which offered a suggested solution to the issue(s) covered by the article were coded as follows i) policy to enable or support the status quo – address sector’s need for more seasonal labour within the same industry system/structure, for example with calls for government to bring forward or expand a seasonal worker scheme ii) policy to enable or support change – improve pay, conditions, rights to workers (migrant and indigenous iii) innovation – through technology or “outside the box” thinking such as new business models or creative problem solving and iv) other – where none of the above.

These 4 solution codes are referred to as “status quo”, “change”, “innovation” and “other”. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of articles by type of solution offered pre and post Covid-19. Most notable is the changing focus from a status quo solution in the pre Covid-19 period, to an innovation solution in the post Covid-19 period. 41 (62%) of all articles written in the pre Covid-19 period offer a status quo solution. In the post Covid-19 period, the predominant solution shifted from “status quo” to an “innovation” solution found in 18 (69%) articles.



Analysis found a strong correlation between headline rating “concern for farm business” and solution type “status quo” for articles written pre Covid-19. Of the 31 articles with a headline coded “concern for farm business”, 24 (77%) were coded for a status quo solution. The focus shifted in the post Covid-19 period with 9 (35%) articles having a “concern for food supply” headline and an “innovation” solution.

### ***Stakeholder representation and voices***

Figure 6 shows the frequency with which stakeholders were mentioned or directly quoted. Workers were both the most frequently mentioned and the least quoted stakeholders in all articles. In the farming press workers were mentioned in 29 (69%) articles but only quoted in 1 (2%) articles. In the mainstream press workers were mentioned in 30 (60%) articles and quoted in 8 (16%) articles, of which 6 were “quality” newspapers. In 7 of the 8 articles, workers were quoted alongside their employer, reinforcing – or at least not disagreeing with - the point(s) made by the employer.

Farm business groups were the most frequently quoted interest groups across both press, quoted in 28 (67%) articles in the farming press and 24 (48%) articles in the mainstream press. The NFU (including NFU Scotland) was the most frequently quoted, appearing in 36 (72%) of all articles in which an interest group was quoted. Table 6 shows the 3 individuals most frequently quoted are all

farming industry representatives. By contrast, interest groups other than those representing farming interests, were rarely mentioned, quoted in just 3 (7%) of farming press articles and 7 (14%) of mainstream press articles. After interest groups, the next most frequently quoted stakeholders were farmers and politicians, the latter being quoted in 14 (33%) articles in the farming press and 17 (34%) articles in the mainstream press. Farmers were quoted in the farming press in 13 (31%) articles and in 21 (42%) articles in the mainstream press. Labour providers accounted for the majority of quoted stakeholders in “other” with CEO, Stephanie Maurel, the 6<sup>th</sup> most frequently quoted individual overall (see Table 6).

It is interesting to note which ‘elite’ voices were absent. None of the 92 articles included quotes from trade unions or supermarkets. Social or food policy experts from academia were also less present in reporting than might be expected: only quoted in 3 (3%) articles which were all published in The Guardian.

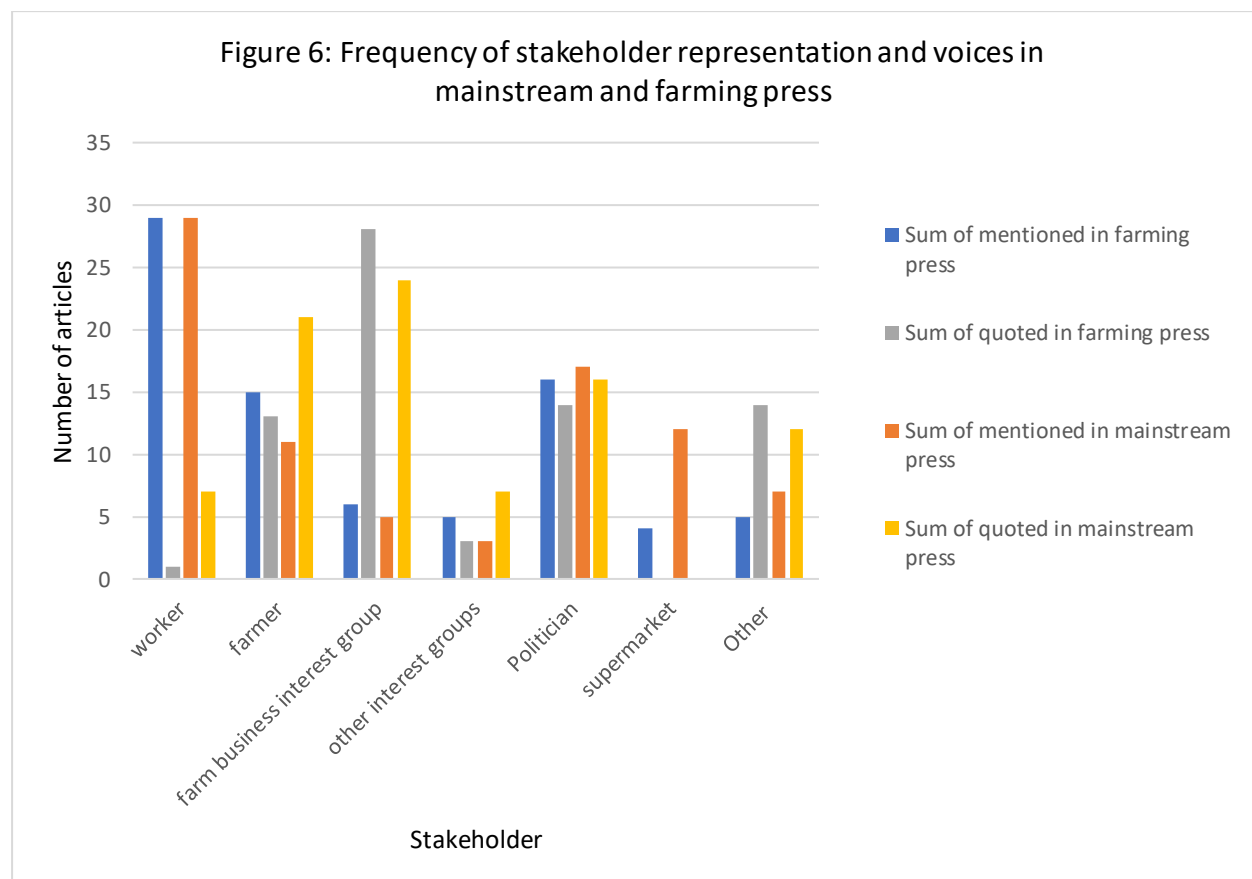


**Table 6: Individuals most frequently quoted in articles**

| Individual quoted                                                             | Farming Press | Mainstream Press | Total All Press (number & %age) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------------------------|
| <b>Alison Capper</b><br>Farmer and Chair NFU Horticulture Board               | 7             | 10               | 17 (18%)                        |
| <b>Nick Marston</b><br>CEO, British Summer Fruits                             | 6             | 9                | 15 (17%)                        |
| <b>James Porter</b><br>Farmer and Chair, Horticulture Committee, NFU Scotland | 9             | 5                | 14 (16%)                        |
| <b>Unnamed Government Spokesperson</b>                                        | 1             | 7                | 8 (9%)                          |
| <b>Andrew McCornick</b><br>President NFU Scotland                             | 6             | 1                | 7 (8%)                          |
| <b>Stephanie Maurel</b><br>CEO, Concordia                                     | 0             | 6                | 6 (7%)                          |
| <b>George Eustice MP</b><br>DEFRA Minister                                    | 1             | 5                | 6 (7%)                          |
| <b>Jack Ward</b><br>CEO, British Growers' Association                         | 0             | 5                | 5 (6%)                          |
| <b>Michael Gove MP</b><br>DEFRA Secretary of State                            | 3             | 1                | 4 (4%)                          |
| <b>Meg Marshall</b><br>Director, Peter Marshall & Co Farms                    | 2             | 2                | 4 (4%)                          |

(source: Author)

## 3.2 Latent Data

The framing of UK horticulture's use of migrant labour was coded for using the following categories:

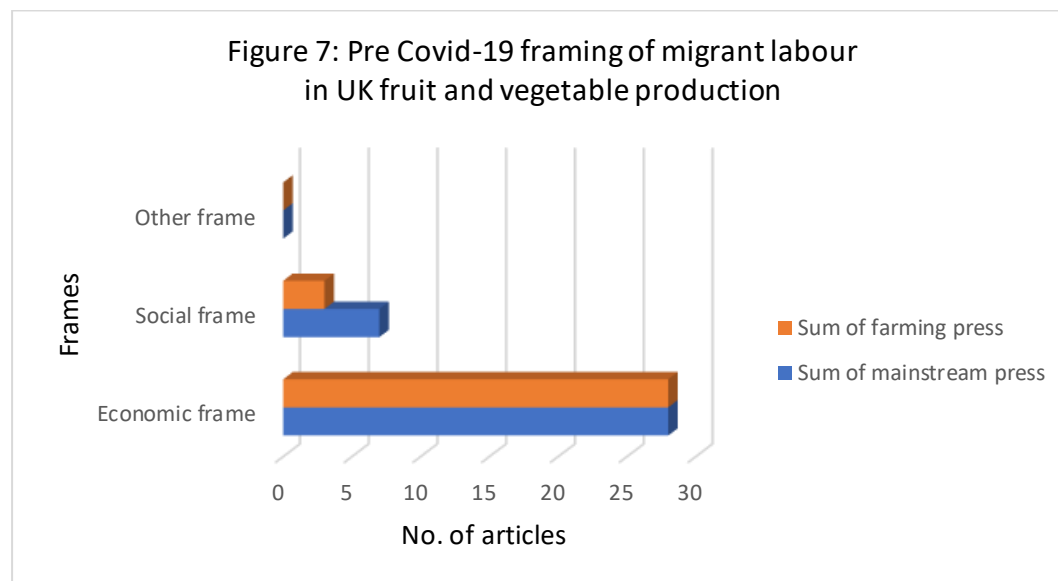
- Economic frame: workers as a factor of production.
- Social frame: workers as having/lacking rights and entitlements.
- Other frame

The "economic" and "social" frames were informed by the literature (Section 3.4.1 on designing the coding frame). The 3 framing options are hereafter referred to as "economic", "social" and "other".

Whilst analysis found subtle differences in the use of frames between mainstream and farming press, the most notable difference in framing was found between articles written in the pre and post Covid-19 period, and findings are therefore logically organized into these two periods. It is noted that the small sample of post Covid-19 articles can only provide an indication – rather than a conclusive pattern – of framing.

### ***Framing in the pre Covid-19 period***

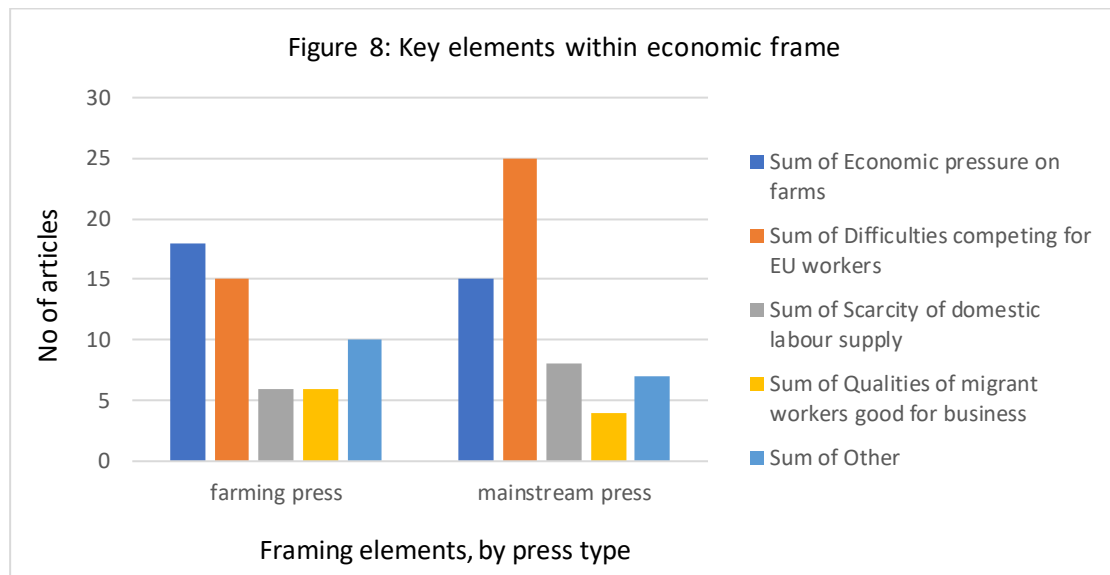
All articles in the pre Covid-19 period were found to use either an economic or social frame as shown in Figure 7.



The economic frame was dominant across all press, present in 28 (90%) articles in the farming press, and 28 (80%) articles in the mainstream press.

The economic frame comprised 4 key framing elements plus “other”. Figure 8 shows the prevalence of these individual framing elements in both press. The most dominant element of the economic framing in the farming press was the economic pressure on farms to remain productive, competitive and profitable, present in 18 (64%) articles coded for economic framing, compared to 15 (43%) in the mainstream press.

The difficulty competing for EU seasonal workers was a more prevalent element of framing in the mainstream press, present in 25 (71%) articles compared to 15 (48%) in the farming press. Of the 10 (32) articles in the farming press coded for “other” framing element, 6 articles mentioned the dependence of annual farm profitability on sufficient experienced pickers in the critical few weeks of peak season.



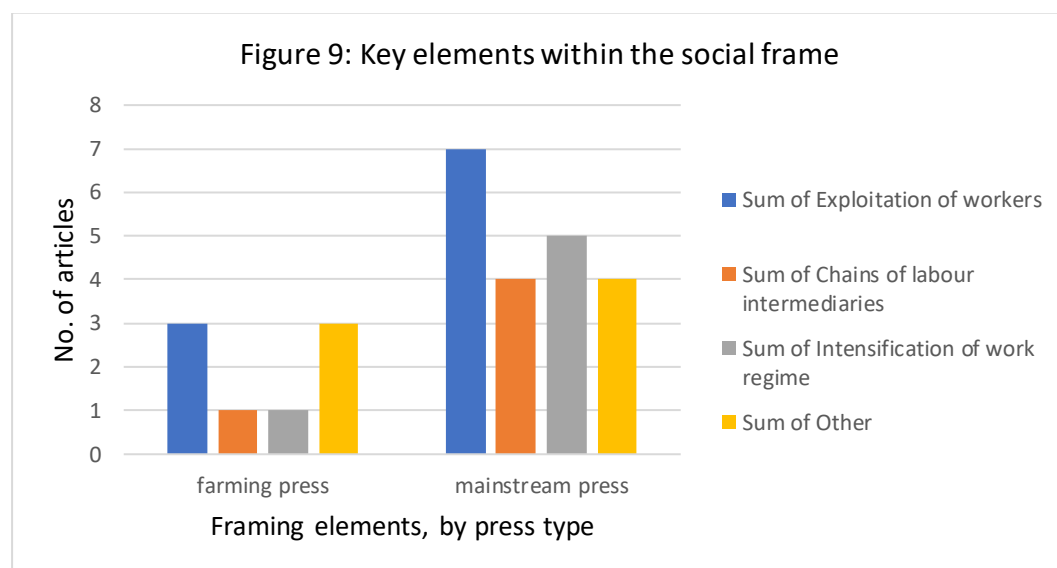
The social frame was less prevalent, present in 7 (20%) articles in the mainstream press, and only 3 (10%) articles in the farming press.

The social frame comprised 3 key framing elements plus “other”. Figure 9 shows the prevalence of these individual framing elements in both press. Articles in the farming press were less likely to mention key elements of the “social” frame in reporting with exploitation of workers mentioned in 10% of articles compared to 20% in the mainstream press, labour chains mentioned in 3% of articles compared to 11% in the mainstream press, and intensification of the working environment mentioned in 3% of articles compared to 14% in the mainstream press.

Together, exploitation of workers and chains of labour intermediaries was present in 31% of articles in the mainstream press compared to 13% of articles in the farming press. Intensification of the

working environment, barely mentioned in the farming press, was mentioned in 5 (14%) articles in the mainstream press.

The majority of articles coded for the “other” element of the social frame mentioned the Brexit discourse that migrants were not welcome in Britain, such as *Brexit could herald end to British fruit and veg sales, producers warn*: “[fruit farmer] Davidson said ‘we are genuinely concerned. People over there are feeling they are not wanted here.’” (Carrington, 2016).



### ***Framing in the post Covid-19 period***

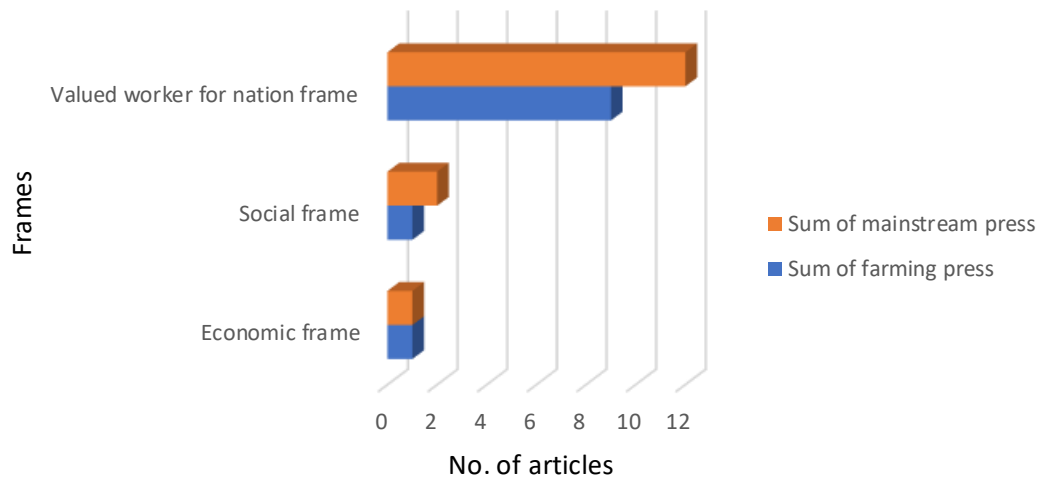
Figure 10 shows the framing used in articles in the post Covid-19 period. Framing in pre and post Covid-19 periods was similar to the extent that social framing never exceeded 20% of articles over either period. The only post Covid-19 article in the farming press framing the issue as a matter of workers’ rights and entitlements, was an opinion piece in *Farmers Weekly* by Nicola Ray, Head of Regulation at the GLAA, 05/06/20, *Pandemic is no excuse for labour protection to slide* (Clarke, 2020). In the mainstream press, the 2 articles deploying a social frame focused on the intensification of the working environment as the principal reason why the call for a “Land Army” of furloughed workers to pick fruit would ultimately fail to materialise.

378 Framing changed in the post Covid-19 period in two key respects. First, prevalence of the economic  
379 frame fell sharply in the post Covid-19 period, deployed in just 1 article apiece in the mainstream  
380 and farming press. Second, a new frame emerged in which the social status of both the work and  
381 workers became elevated, with nostalgic evocations of the national effort of World War II. The  
382 researcher called this the “valued workers for the nation” frame, present in 12 (80%) articles in the  
383 mainstream press and 9 (81%) articles in the farming press. Analysis found this frame comprised a 3-  
384 stage narrative arc, beginning at the end of March 2020 after the launch of the joint government and  
385 industry “Pick for Britain” campaign ([pickforbritain.org.uk](http://pickforbritain.org.uk), 2020). This stage was characterized by  
386 stirring calls for British workers to come forward to do the skilled and important harvesting work to  
387 help feed the nation. Interestingly, this narrative often included a comment about earnings  
388 representing a “top up” to 80% furlough pay.

389 The second narrative stage saw reporting focus on farmers’ discretionary preference for migrant  
390 labour because of concern that British workers would not respond in sufficient quantity with the  
391 qualities required.

392 Finally, a third narrative stage described a back-lash from British workers who felt passed-over for  
393 picking work because of farmers’ preference for migrant labour.

Figure 10: Post Covid-19 framing of migrant labour in UK fruit and vegetable production



#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings show greater similarity than difference in reporting between mainstream and farming press with reporting strongly slanted towards issues impacting farm businesses. The frequent focus on government appears consistent with the view of policy analysts that the transformation of the food system will only be achieved by government taking the lead (Lang *et al.*, 2009: 177). However, deeper analysis of frames and discourses shows the focus on government's role is framed as one of policy fixing to "tweak" the system to support the status quo rather than policy reform to bring about fundamental change to the system. The need to maintain the food supply was another dominant issue mentioned. By contrast, supermarkets as the cause or driver of farmers' dependency on migrant labour was barely mentioned. This was unexpected given the substantial evidence that the dominance of supermarkets has been the major factor in farmers' loss of value (Doolan, 2004; ILO, 2007: 25; Fuchs & Kalfgianni, 2010 and Dixon & Banwell, 2016). The fact that the issues of "unspecified pressures" and "supply chain dynamics" were mentioned with greater frequency in the farming press suggests more nebulous references may act as code for a farming sector hesitant to

publicly criticize supermarkets as the principal cause of low farm margins and workers' wages. This is, perhaps, understandable given supermarkets' role as regulator and gatekeeper to the sector's biggest market. While the scope of this study is too limited to arrive at a firm conclusion as to why this might be, it may warrant further investigation.

The clear slant in reporting towards business was found to be mirrored in headlines with many articles in the pre Covid-19 period coded as having a headline "concern for farm business". Further, a strong correlation was found between this headline and solution type "status quo" (i.e. policy to address the sector's need for more seasonal labour within the same industry system/structure). This correlation is consistent with business groups who tend to act as defenders of the status quo, preferring stability over the risk of uncertainty and loss of power brought about by pro-change groups (Birkland, 1998). Headlines coded as "concern for farm workers" were few for both types of press.

The crisis of the Covid-19 pandemic did bring significant change to the focus of headlines and solutions offered. The predominant focus of headlines across both press switched to "concern for food supply" with an "innovation" solution (i.e. use of technology, adoption of new business models, creative, unusual problem solving). It shows that whilst crisis can be the catalyst for change in the framing of established policy issues and decisions on actions to take, such events, by themselves, do not bring about a change of framing in favour of under-represented non-elite groups. None of the articles in the post Covid-19 period were coded for a "change" solution (i.e. policy to improve pay, conditions, rights to workers). Overall, few articles were coded for a "change" solution, strongly suggesting reporting lacked the frequency required to influence public or policymakers' opinions or priorities (McCombs and Shaw, 1972: 177 and Wood *et al.*, 2014: 583).

The chief difference in reporting between mainstream and farming press was in frequency. As might be expected, the farming press, with its primary role to deliver highly targeted content to its specific sector audience (Peck, 2015), reported with greatest frequency, particularly in the post Covid-19

period. This supports the literature which has found the specialist trade press to be more active than mainstream press in early stage reporting of an industry-related issue in an attempt to shape policymakers' understanding and policy positions (Hollifield, 1997: 769). Findings showed that this trait was also in evidence in 2018 in the run up to the government's decision on whether to pilot a new SAWS scheme.

Whilst the farming press' long-standing practice of sourcing content from farmers (Fussell, 1932) ensures the practitioners' voice is included in reporting, the prevalence of certain stakeholder voices being represented more frequently than others raises questions of bias and lack of objectivity arising from the close relationship between publication and its primary audience (Entman, 2007; Hollifield 1997 and Sweeney & Hollifield, 2000).

In both press in the post Covid-19 period, the tone of headline shifted from concern for farm businesses to concern for the food supply. Whilst solutions also shifted towards "innovation" to get the harvest in for the nation, the nature of solutions remained focused on solving problems for farm businesses rather than applying innovative thinking to improve conditions for workers.

Findings have shown a clear divergence between the literature and press reporting. The literature focuses on the power dynamics of buyer-driven supply chains where supermarket dominance leads to exploitation of migrant workers (Doolan, 2004; Barrientos *et al.*, 2011 and Davies, 2020). By contrast, reporting in both press focuses on government's failure to bring forward policy to mitigate the effects for farm businesses of buyer-driven supply chains in which migrant workers remain a factor of production and a prerequisite to farmers' profitability (Bauder, 2005; Rogaly, 2008 and Geddes & Scott, 2010). This difference may be attributable to the dominance and absence of the different stakeholders.

In both press, migrant farm workers were the least quoted stakeholder group after supermarkets, who were the only stakeholder group not quoted. Findings are consistent with studies analysing media reporting of social issues where the voices of non-elite groups are an absent or minimal

presence (McKendrick *et al.*, 2008 and Wells & Caraher, 2014: 1439). Furthermore, findings show that where migrant workers were quoted, it was alongside their employers, usually supporting – or at least not disagreeing – with their employers’ views. Whilst the absence of workers’ voices is consistent with other studies, it is not possible within the scope of this study to understand the underlying reasons. Journalists may lack time and resources required to seek out the hard-to-reach voices of temporary migrant workers. It may be farmers are reluctant to give journalist access to their farm-based migrant workers, or workers may feel a risk to their employment or themselves if they were to speak directly to the press.

It is interesting to note those potentially influential voices that were minimally present or absent. Trade union, supermarkets and academics are all considered elite sources with potential to influence media framing by virtue of their status (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). In relation to workers, the trade unions, including those representing agricultural workers, such as the Landworkers’ Alliance were entirely absent. Social and food policy academics were also rarely quoted in articles despite their elite expert status which affords them privileged access to the media (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016: 455). Their near absence in reporting might account, in part, for the divergence between the literature and press reporting. A stronger presence of academics in reporting might result in a more effective counter-balance to the dominant business slant in reporting which focuses on fixes to the system rather than reform.

Farm business groups were the most frequently quoted in both press, with greatest frequency in the farming press, with the NFU most prominent. This is consistent with the literature which finds business groups one of the most effective of the official elite groups influencing the media’s framing of issues (Kingdon, 2014 and Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). This is partly because they have well-resourced media strategies, and partly because they are the preferred primary news source for journalists who see them as credible and authoritative (Dekavalla & Jelen-Sanchez, 2016). It also points to the consequences of the market model of journalism, where an exchange relation -

between journalists and the PR arms of well-resourced interest groups - helps print publications to “square the circle” between declining revenues and the need to produce more content (Lewis *et al.*, 2008). This practice of “churnalism” (Davies, 2009) is pervasive across all genres of print media, including the quality broadsheets, traditionally the home of independent journalism (Lewis *et al.*, 2008). Findings show that the market model of journalism enabled farm business groups to exert considerable influence in setting and framing the debate and provides an explanation for the focus on issues impacting business rather than workers, and the reason why Table 6 shows the top 3 most quoted individuals all represent farming interest groups and 9 of the top 10 most frequently quoted individuals were either representatives of farm business groups, farmers or government.

Economic framing in mainstream press articles most frequently mentioned the difficulty competing with other EU countries for migrant workers. This may reflect the relevance of this issue beyond the farming sector; freedom of movement was a key Brexit issue, of concern to many sectors of the economy and central to the contentious issue of immigration control. The most dominant element of the economic frame reported by the farming press was the pressure on farms to remain productive, competitive and profitable. Similar to findings by Bauder (2005), intensification of the work regime was an element of the social frame that was found to cross-over into the economic frame in some articles in the farming press. This may be indicative of the normalisation of “awful but lawful” practices (Passas, 2005) found to be present within the agri-sector (Davies, 2019). Farmers quoted in reporting appeared unaware of the social implications of what they were saying (assuming they have not been quoted out of context). This is often indicative of industry lexicon which has developed around the use of low paid migrant labour, where worker “qualities” have become code for worker compliance borne out of vulnerability (Bauder, 2005; Rogaly, 2008 and Geddes & Scott, 2010).

By contrast, the worker-focussed “social frame” of workers having (or lacking) rights and entitlements, was present in a minority of articles. With trade unions absent in reporting, workers

are reliant on the vanishing practice of independent journalism to “find” their stories in order to frame reporting as a social issue about workers’ rights and entitlements.

Whilst both farming and mainstream press were similar to the extent that the social frame was found in a small minority of articles, there were some interesting differences of emphasis. The 3 main elements of the social frame (the 4<sup>th</sup> being “other”), were reported with greater frequency in the mainstream press than the farming press. Exploitation of workers was mentioned more in mainstream press than in farming press, along with intensification of the work regime and labour chains (use of gangmasters). There are several reasons which might account for this difference. First, farmers – operating in an economically challenging supply chain - may be inured to the “everyday” exploitation of migrant workers. Second, farmers were frequently quoted in reporting saying how they valued their migrant workers, many of whom were returnees to the farm over many years. It is reasonable to assume that farming, like any other industry sector, has good employers and bad employers. Many farmers will have honestly held views that they provide decent pay and conditions for their migrant workers. Third, there is evidence to suggest that the farming press is less likely than the mainstream press to report on issues that have negative implications for its industry sector (Sweeney & Hollifield, 2000).

Analysis identified a 3 stage narrative arc, similar to Morrison’s study of UK newspapers’ reporting of migrant workers following the 2016 Brexit referendum in which reporting was found to undergo a number of ‘discursive shifts’ in a ‘frantic battle for sense-making’ (2019: 607). The 3 stage narrative arc began with an evocation of a cohesive society united in a national war-time effort to “dig for victory”, such as the article headline in The Daily Mail, *Who will dig for victory today?* (Adams, 2020). In this stage, reporting focused on the joint initiative by government and industry for a new “land army” of pickers to come forward to bring home the harvest for the nation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> stage of the narrative arc focused on farmers’ discretionary preference for migrant workers over British workers because of the former’s skills, experience and work ethic. The 3<sup>rd</sup> stage of the narrative arc took an

ironic twist as British workers complained of farmers passing them over for picking jobs in favour of migrants.

The “valued workers for the nation” frame reveals some lack of social consciousness by a farming industry and government that did not appear to see inconsistency or irony in rallying people to work for the national good when most of that work has been, and continues to be, done by migrant workers themselves excluded from entitlements only associated with citizenship. Nor was there a sense of any inequality or injustice in framing pay rates as good wages for migrant workers, but only a nice “top up” to wages for British workers.

What the findings (although limited in sample) appear to show is that, as a focusing event, the Covid-19 pandemic had not yet brought a radical change of media reporting from an economic to social frame in which the social deficiencies in the UK’s dependence upon, attitudes to, and treatment of migrant workers are critically explored. However, the limited scope and timing of this study, undertaken at the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak in the UK, means our findings will undoubtedly benefit from further research to ascertain whether a more dominant social frame emerges in a later, more reflective stage of reporting as the Covid-19 pandemic develops and matures. Similarly, further research to incorporate analysis of digital media would improve the reliability of findings and provide a more comprehensive picture for policy-makers and analysts to act upon.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This study’s findings contribute to filling a knowledge gap as social and food policymakers consider how to re-orientate the UK’s fruit and vegetable production towards a socially just and sustainable post-Brexit, post-pandemic future. This study’s comparative analysis of farming and mainstream press is important for policy analysts and policymakers for two reasons. First, it provides insights into

what the priority issues are for the UK's fruit and vegetable producers, and how they understand those issues in terms of causes, responsibilities, and solutions. Differences in the farming press are subtle rather than substantive, but nonetheless important, and provide those involved in food and agricultural policy with a window into the "world-view" of our primary food producers - an important food system stakeholder. Second, it provides a benchmark against which to compare the mainstream press. The dominant slant in the farming press' reporting towards the interests and concerns of farm business is to be expected of a specialist trade press. Of greater implication for policy makers is the fact that the mainstream press was found not to differ substantively in what it reported and the framing used. Both mainstream and farming press focus on economic symptoms rather than underlying socio-political root causes, embedded in our neo-liberal political economy. While reporting most frequently mentions government as being culpable for issues relating to UK horticulture's use of, and dependency upon, migrant labour, it is not framed in the context of government's responsibility to undertake fundamental social and economic reform. Rather, the focus of reporting was on government's responsibility to undertake policy fixes for the benefit of those who currently benefit from the status quo. This study finds that the most influential factor shaping mainstream print media's reporting is the dominant market model of journalism in which those with the most resources – human and financial – get to shape reporting, and by extension, policy-making. This applies across all genres of newspapers where 'meaningful independent journalistic activity ... is the exception rather than the rule'. (Lewis *et al.*, 2008: 17). The study clearly shows that farm business groups were highly effective in mobilizing their media strategies to take every opportunity to ensure their framing of the issue was prominent in reporting.

The evidence that mainstream print media predominantly reflects the interests of elite groups, can help policy-makers to prioritise engagement with a broad range of media to inform their opinions and policy positions. Notably, social media has been found to provide a more accessible and effective platform than 'old media' for non-elite stakeholders to frame the debate on their own terms. Stakeholder groups campaigning for a more socially-just system within food - and other areas

378 of the economy with similar issues of precarity - may use this evidence to consider how to  
 379 develop strategies to achieve comparable levels of access and impact to establish a more prominent  
 380 countervailing social framing in media reporting.

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